



Cotham School, Cotham Lawn Road,
Bristol, BS6 6DT
Headteacher: Ms Jo Butler
t: 0117 919 8000
e: info@cotham.bristol.sch.uk
www.cotham.bristol.sch.uk

Dear students

When there are monumental moments that shake our world, we would normally spend time in school talking things through, debating and planning to take action. This would usually take place in assemblies, tutor time, lessons, corridors and on the playground. Sadly, we cannot do this at the moment; however, it is very important to acknowledge and start talking about what is happening both in the USA and closer to home here in the UK.

It is so important that we do not shy away from the hard truths. Instead, we need to arm ourselves with knowledge that will give us the power to create real and sustainable change in a world that is crying out for people to not remain silent in the face of injustice and brutality.

We know that there are acts of unkindness and bullying that occur between individuals of different ethnic groups and, at a time like this, it is all the more important that this stops and that we pull together as one school community. However, the horrendous recent murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor are not one-off occurrences for Black communities and this has yet again shone a stark light on the reality of the racism, violence and discrimination that continues to plague BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) people on a daily basis. We want to recognise that it is not the sole responsibility of our BAME students and staff to speak out about the need for societal, structural and institutional change to eradicate racism - this responsibility belongs to us all. These systems are not 'broken'; they were intentionally built that way and it therefore needs to be intentionally overhauled and challenged. We need to be brave enough to address the root issues and not shy away from uncomfortable discussions.

Most of the attention right now is on racism in the US but, in the UK, racism is just as much of an issue. In some ways the racism in the UK is less obvious and more subtle. In other ways we do have clear examples to turn to: be it the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the Windrush scandal, the disproportionate rate of BAME persons appearing in police Stop and Search statistics, the shooting of Mark Duggan by police in 2011 that sparked protests around the country, the murder of Stephen Lawrence or many other examples of brutality by those in authority. NSPCC research also shows that racial abuse and bullying of BAME children has risen by one-fifth since 2016 when the UK voted on Brexit. Likewise, as the global coronavirus pandemic continues, we are aware of evidence that BAME people in the UK and America are at disproportionately higher risk of illness, death, and bereavement, despite the same high statistics not being seen in Africa, Asia or other European countries with a significant BAME population. We are conscious that these health worries place additional stress and burden on all of our school community and our BAME families in particular.

It goes without saying that ALL lives matter, but right now we need to stand with #blacklivesmatter, because it is black lives that are in danger. Despite the lessening influence



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of the British Empire, the abolition of slavery in the mid-1800s, the 1960s Civil Rights' movement, the introduction of anti-discrimination laws and the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, the racism and discrimination facing BAME communities is incredibly long-standing and disappointingly persistent.

It is also important at this time that everyone thinks about their privilege. This can be challenging, but if you are white/caucasian then it is important to understand that the idea of 'white privilege', a phrase that you may have heard, does not mean that your life has been easy; it simply means that your skin colour does not make it harder. White privilege exists as a direct result of both historic and lasting racism, biases and practices that were established to oppress those who were seen as visibly different from the majority of the population. Understanding this will help all of us to engage with the conversations and processes necessary to start addressing the causes and impact of racism. At Cotham we often talk about being an 'ally', but the word is useless without action. Being an ally means that the next time you hear someone make a racist comment or actively discriminate against a BAME person you speak out and challenge it, either in the moment or later when you tell an adult what happened. Civil rights activist Angela Davis famously stated: *"In a racist society it is not enough to be non-racist. We must be anti-racist."* This means that inaction is not enough - being against racism is not enough. We ALL need to find a way to be ANTI-racist and back this up with action.

We know that the injustice that has led to the protests around the world might make you angry or frustrated - as they should; it is enraging and we know that a lot of you want to do something about it. Some of you may even be considering joining the upcoming marches in Bristol to protest and make your voice heard. Peaceful protests are important spaces; however, we cannot forget that we are in the middle of a health pandemic and it is still vitally important that we socially distance. Large groups of people without social distancing could unintentionally spread the virus. If you choose to protest with your parents or carers please ensure that you keep yourself and others safe. Here is a [LIST](#) of ways to engage with what is happening and further educate yourself. If you need support or are struggling with any of these issues, there are a lot of people who can help you, both in school and in the community; click [HERE](#) to see the support available.

You may have seen the Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, pause for an incredible 20 seconds before answering a reporter's question on what is happening in the USA right now. He paused for this long because he gave his answer a lot of careful thought before speaking. In his reply he drew attention to the problems that BAME people are facing in his own country and spoke passionately about addressing this. We think that this is important. Vital conversations need to be had around the experiences of BAME people in our country and in our city; only then will we see change. Our incredible Cotham School community is all the more amazing because of our diversity. You matter and your voice matters so we will continue these conversations with you when we see you back with us. Over the last year we, the staff, have been working hard on recognising unconscious bias and the issue of



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inequalities within our education system, both of which are important concerns for schools across the country to address and especially in Bristol. All of our staff at Cotham are passionate about continuing this work so that your experience of education at Cotham recognises and celebrates the history and achievements of all groups of people in our diverse community. Finally, everyone at Cotham is here to support you and if you want to talk about this some more, please get in touch.

Take care, be kind and stay safe

The Cotham Senior Leadership Team



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